

■ **I think great employees figure out what it takes to do outstanding work. I know what outstanding work means to me, but should I share my view or continue to have those who are outstanding emerge among their peers to show others “how it’s done?”**

Be up front and specific with employees about what you believe they can do to demonstrate outstanding work performance. This is in the interest of your agency and individual workplace. Some supervisors think that if they tell employees what outstanding performance represents, then they have given away “the secret” and this will diminish their ability to judge an employee’s initiative. This is false logic. If asking for additional or challenging work assignments or finding and sharing with peers the ways to make tedious or repetitive work more interesting is outstanding performance, say so. If demonstrating good communication, keeping you informed of work progress, or maintaining an upbeat attitude are outstanding work traits, then let employees know it. The purpose of outstanding performance is the advancement of the workplace mission. Avoid making outstanding performance a mystery or a frustrating puzzle employees can’t figure out. Managers and supervisor will discover more outstanding employees by letting them know what great performance looks like.

■ **I feel like a heel if I consider disciplinary action for an employee having ongoing performance problems when they are also working with the EAP to resolve personal issues. The advice to “just focus on performance” doesn’t make me feel better.**

Frequently, supervisors do not have a complete understanding of both the helping or humanitarian rationale for EAPs and the supervisor’s equally important business rationale. Understanding these principles by talking about them with an employee assistance professional can help you see that improving performance is the responsibility of your employee. Your job is to offer every resource you can reasonably make available to help your employee perform satisfactorily. Good communication, written expectations and clear agreements are all essential components of good supervision. If you wonder if you have done everything reasonable to help your employee reach an acceptable level of performance, this could be a good discussion to have with the EAP and may give you clarity, permission and the willingness to do the right thing for your employee and the workplace.

I am too soft as a supervisor and need to get more assertive with employees who break rules, come in late, or don't produce quality work. Can the EAP help me with some quick advice on turning things around?

The EAP is a good place to begin. You describe making a workplace culture

change, and you should anticipate resistance. Employees may resent your efforts at a "supervision-style makeover" since they have naturally grown to believe you don't take these matters seriously. The EAP will provide initial suggestions and may recommend additional referrals. The EA professional can help you identify and respond appropriately to various employee behaviors and will also consult with you on managing the reactions of individual employees who may resist more than others. Remember, behaviors usually do not change quickly. It is likely you will be looking at a long process and will need ongoing support and coaching to accomplish your goals. In addition to talking with your EAP, be sure and consult with your manager and HR. Their support will be essential in order to achieve lasting success.

EAPs offer consultation to supervisors. As part of this consultative role, can they advise management on the possible effects of a disciplinary action, particularly its potential effect on an employee's mental state?

Employee assistance professionals frequently consult with supervisors,

but this consultation refers to helpful guidance on specific aspects of the supervisor's role in making a referral to the EAP. It is not an appropriate role of the employee assistance professional to render a psychiatric opinion to management about the capacity of an employee client to withstand the effects or distress of a disciplinary action. Doing so would be outside the standard and acceptable functions that define EAPs. EAPs discuss limited information. Specific information is never given unless an employee agrees to share via a signed and properly executed consent for disclosure. EAP involvement with disciplinary choices would be inappropriate and represent a conflict of interest and a disservice to the employee.

I have an employee who impulsively says or does things at work that are socially inappropriate. Quality of work is okay, but you never know what may be blurted out at a meeting or in a hallway. Is this a problem with the employee's common sense? Is it ADHD or something psychiatric?

Impulsive behavior by employees in the workplace can be frustrating for coworkers and management alike. The problem may be caused by medical or mental disorders, but it is important that you remain focused on performance behaviors and don't try to diagnose an employee's condition. Frequently, such employees are disciplined or referred to employee assistance programs because of a specific act that is shocking enough to be considered harassing, offensive, disruptive, or intimidating to peers. Employees with impulsive behavior may be very bright but socially awkward. They may insist that an offensive act was without malicious intent or was misunderstood. Often however, they may also be frustrated at their inability to consistently control impulsive behavior. Be sure to document problems with these employees well before a referral to the EAP, so the employee assistance professional can see the pattern in order to conduct the most effective assessment and provide helpful referrals.

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